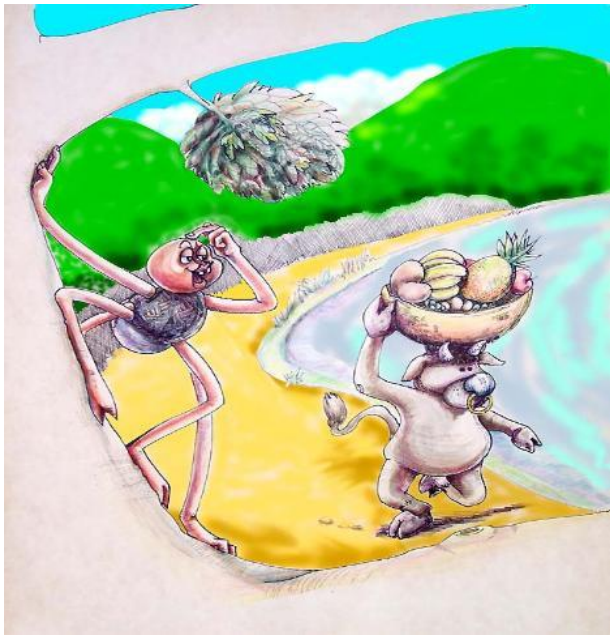

Anansi and the Yam Hills
by Michael Auld

Once in a before time, there lived an old woman who had magical powers. Her name was **5**. She was also so evil that some people called her a witch. **5** hated her name. No one knows why her parents named her the number **5.** When she was a child, other children would make fun of her name. Sometimes when she was within earshot, they would look out the corner of their eyes and giggle as they said. Give me **5**!"

When she grew up, **5** decided to put an end to the name-calling. So, she created a weird spell. "Anyone who says '**5**' will drop dead," she said. Then she changed her mind. "From this day on, anyone who says '**5**' will disappear,"

This spell immediately caused a problem in the country. No one could say that number again without disappearing. Children could no longer recite their five times tables. People had to drop the word 'five' from their vocabulary. In **5**'s village, the unlucky number was no longer **13**.

Once, a customer asked a merchant, "How much is that blue T-shirt?" "That shirt is **5** doh... " Suddenly there was a loud "**SWOOSH!**" before the merchant could finish his sentence. He disappeared right in front of the dumbfounded customer's eyes!

A crafty spider named Anansi lived in **5**'s village. He had heard about the witch's spell. Times were very hard. Anansi was not a farmer and he had no food at all to eat. His wife and children were starving. Since Anansi was small, and not a very good worker, he could only

rely on his brain to get whatever he needed to survive. He said to himself. "Things are tough, boy! I **must** make this witch's spell work for me".

Anansi went to the road that led to the village's marketplace. He chose a spot on the side of the road where everyone on the way to market would have to pass. There, near a large Guangu tree, he decided to pile up five mounds of the rich brown soil. These mounds he called "yam hills". In the top of each yam hill, he planted an African yellow yam. Then he drove a stake next to the yam on which its vine could grow. Anansi carefully watered the yams until each one began to sprout.

Anansi made a web-like a hammock in the Guangu tree and patiently waited for someone to come by. Early one morning, after each yam shoot had poked its head out of a mound, Anansi sat down next to his yam hills. Soon, Brother Dog came by on his way to the market. Dog balanced a bankra basket of sweet-smelling fruits on his head as he walked down the road.

"Good morning Brother Dog," said Anansi in a sugary voice. "I know that you are busy, and I feel so stupid. I am not an educated man like you. Would you help me to count how many yam hills that I have planted here?" Anansi asked.

"You should have gone to school to learn how to count!" Brother Dog said grumpily as he walked away from Anansi towards the market. Anansi climbed up into the Guangu tree and waited. The next person to come by was Brother Bull. He carried large basket of fruits on his head.

"Good day Bro' Bull." Anansi said in a sad voice. "Could you just spare me one minute?" Anansi begged. "What can I do for you, Anansi?" Bro' Bull asked."I was a *yikki and sickly child. So, my parents did not send me to school. I never learned my ABC's. I planted all these yam hills... Can you help me to count them?" Anansi said."But, of course Anansi" Bro' Bull replied. "You have 1, 2, 3, 4, **5**...."

SWOOSH!

As he said that number, Brother Bull disappeared into thin air. The basket of sweet ripe fruits that he had been carrying on his head, fell to the ground. Anansi snatched up the basket of fruits and rushed home to eat them all.

For a long time, Anansi did very well tricking some passersby into counting his yam hills. He grew fat from all the baskets of food he had gathered. He had tricked Brothers Turtle, Owl, Mongoose, Hare, Peenie-Wallie the firefly, and even the tough Bro' Scorpion.

Mrs. Guinea fowl was a nice young mother of newly hatched children. She could not say 'no' to anyone. She and her husband shared the chore of selling their produce in the village. That day it

was her turn to go to the marketplace. She loaded up her hand basket and headed for the market. As she got closer to the yam hills Anansi was nowhere in sight. Just as she was about to pass yam hill number 4, Anansi the spider lowered himself down from his perch in the Guangu tree. He called out in his sugary voice. "Good morning Mrs. Guinea Fowl. Could you help me with a problem?"

"Of course Anansi". The polite Mrs. Guinea Fowl said.

"I have these yam hills here, and I don't know how to count ..would you help me... ? Please." Anansi begged. Mrs. Guinea Fowl, who had seen Anansi trick Bro' Scorpion, walked over to the last yam hill and climbed up on top of it. She said. “You have 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... and the one I am standing on".

"What! **What are you doing? That is not the way you count!**" Anansi shouted angrily."What do you mean, Anansi?" Mrs. Guinea Fowl said. "I don't know of any number called 'the one I'm standing on'. Start again!” Anansi ordered.

Mrs. Guinea Fowl began again. "You have 1, 2, 3, 4 ... and the one I am standing on". "**That is not what you are supposed to say!**" Anansi shouted even more angrily. "Well ... If you are so smart... What am I supposed to say?" Mrs. Guinea Fowl asked.

Anansi shouted, "**You are supposed to say 1**, **2**, **3**, **4**, **5** ... Oops…”Suddenly, Anansi disappeared, leaving Mrs. Guinea Fowl with all the loot that he had gotten from tricking his victims.